Entry for *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History* (2009)

Globalisation

One could start from the paper sheet sticked in the shop around the corner window the other day : "today nothing is spared by globalisation, not even the *baguette"*. In order to explain the price rise of this familiar French breadstick to grouchy customers, my baker used "globalisation" as a contemporary factor and the underlying cause behind the skyrocketing price of wheat and cereals. Just like him, leaders and simple citizens alike have resorted to such interpretative scheme in the last 30 years, after the terms "global" and "globalisation", hardly ever new then, began their march to the headlines and the small talk in the middle of the 1980s.

To keep the grips these terms seemed to offer on the current state of our worldly affairs, their users mostly insisted on the break in intensity and nature that was at play in the last decades in terms of interconnection, dependence, convergence, homogenization and fragmentation of human societies and polities on this planet. Just like my baker, they were not very receptive to powerful voices that very early on had warned about the *longue durée* aspects that were incorporated into current patterns. Roland Robertson, Immanuel Wallerstein, Olivier Dollfus, Kevin O'Rourke, Jeffrey Williamson or Anthony King's caveats failed to remind the baker that cereals have been traded on long distances for centuries; that the grains market was 'cornered' from the late 1880s, with speculations in the futures trade on the Chicago market causing the prices to rise in Europe; that the *baguette* is but one juncture into the historical and anthropological history of bread as a staple food of human kind; or that the culture of cereals has expanded and contracted throughout history through acclimatization, random journeys or conquest.

When we embarked upon the project of this dictionary, one of our aims was to act as go-betweens, as it were, for the baker and the social theorists who unsuccessfully tried to urge commentators and citizens alike to identify the ways into which the global pasts of our world was incorporated within its present, rather than asserting its 'newness'. We were also keen to bring first hand historical material to the growing choir of scholars who have stressed that not everything transnational or even long distance is global. Many if not most of the connections and circulations that cross national borders do not embrace the whole planet, they do not by nature add to the interdependence or integration of the world, nor do they connect to integration processes regardless of circumstances of birth.

In other words, and from likely similar empirical reasons, we shared the concerns that Frederick Cooper had expressed in 2001. This historian of

Africa identified three questions that were left unasked by the prophets and Cassandras of globalisation: newness (about the historical depth of interconnection), comprehensiveness (the evolving linking and delinking operated by the circulations at work), and operation (the specificity of the structures that make connections and circulations work). He called for modest but effective ways to analyze processes, networks and social fields that crossed borders by focusing on these empirical questions. Such a contract had been signed off by a significant number of historians in the past and clearly does foot the bill of what we call the transnational perspective. The first hand study of connections an circulations by historians of all trades offers a genuine opportunity to engage the globalisation discourse with our picks and shovels: sources and material. Picking up from Cooper's leads, this entry will sketch the contribution of a transnational perspective on history to the study of globalisation.

Cycles, waves, processes: the timing of globalization

Periodization is the bread and butter of historians, and it stays central as they try to have their say within the globalization discussion. Part of their contribution has to deal with the very long term: the questions about the age of the world system ("500 or 5000 years ?" asked Frank and Gills provocatively in 1993) have been pushed backward and forward by such proposals as Chris Bayly's ideal-type chronologizing of 'archaic', 'proto', 'modern' and 'post colonial' globalization, while world historians or geographers have scrutinized 'human webs' that started to thrive with the colonization of the planet by *homo sapiens*. Such developments have been possible because of first hand research that could be mobilized to chart and map circulations and connections of and about goods, ideas, germs, people, funds, with the result that past interconnections and interdependencies, especially those which were not centered around Europe or the Atlantic world, are now more familiar to us, and prevent us from teleological readings of current trends and patterns. The stake appears to be not so much to tunnel through the past to read the origins of what our times have called globalization, but to identify the manifold configurations that have been seen as high points of integration and interconnection at other times.

A similar possibility is opened by the development of first hand research on circulations and connections in the modern age. The most widely accepted chronologies have been developed within the general attempt to 'root' our current situation and forecast a possible future, and are embedded within two major frames: on one hand, the wish to assess the good and evil sizes of globalization and on the other a focus on the economic aspects that have been central into the perception of "our" globalisation. The most classical formulation is the one inspired by the work of Jeffrey Williamson, that has produced a narrative articulated in three episodes as he contested the

'newness' of globalisation together with the views that erected the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries as a landmark. Focusing on the "open economy forces of trade and mass migrations", Williamson identified economic performance and convergence as the key criteria to assess globalization and sketched three moments. The first phase, between 1850 and 1914, was when globalization began. Its expansion was cut short by a deglobalization phase from 1914 to 1950, as national economies turned outside in, to thrive again from 1950 until the peak of the late 20th century. Some others have proposed a slightly different periodization, like the French economist Charles Albert Michalet who claims to build from a wider range of economic data as he charts three configurations of *mondialisation* ('international' until the 1960s, 'multinational' from then onto the 1980s, and 'global' ever since), each one being characterized by the prominence of a different kind of economic material (goods, services, investments or capital). But Williamson's narrative has became the basis of a canon, endorsed by the World Bank (who shifted the time frame to 1870-1914, 1914-1945 and 1945-1980) or popularized by the allusions to our "first globalisation".

In a recent article, Adam McKeown has engaged this periodization by stressing that it was built mostly from North Atlantic data and focused on a model of development bounded in time and space. Using the example of migrations, Mc Keown has suggested that the portrait of the first globalization left two of the biggest world frontiers out of the picture, that is northern and southeastern Asia. He also underlines that the depiction of 1914-1945 as a moment of deglobalization was only possible by a camouflage of the 1920s and their impressive record of economic convergence and migrations. Following up on his suggestion to pick up from different flows and different regions, reconstructing the connections and circulations across borders can effectively contribute to consideration of a wider world, which is the least one can expect when studying globalization. Considering non economic flows certainly puts the chronology in a different light. Though immigration quotas restricted some kinds of migration in the Atlantic world, refugees' and seasonal workers' movements did not come to a halt, and even increased, while the sea transportation of Asian pilgrims to Mecca peaked in the late 1920s. The interwar years were a crucial moment of connections and circulations in both the social and natural sciences, when both conceptual and organizational definitions were exchanged, translated and appropriated across borders to shape the development of scientific research, policies and institutions. Even the 1930s, the hard core of 'deglobalization' according to the master narrative, have seen almost unprecendented cross-fertilization in the worlds of science, especially with the departure of Italian, Spanish or German artists, scientifics and thinkers. Similarly, those who linked across borders to defend a cause or an interest in the arts, politics or social activism did not stop abruptly to do so during the

inter war. The re-nationalization of the world, which presumably brought about economic deglobalization, also triggered an impressive range of new flows and links (for example about public policies to cope with the depression), while existing ones did not vanish in a snap.
Existing and current research to document the history of circulations and connections, of which only a fraction is presented in this volume, should ultimately lead to re-consideration of the master narrative's periodization. They should support and expand the idea that connections and circulations, and their contribution to fostering convergence and divergence, homogeneity and difference, were at the core of the history of the modern age in a constant fashion. Christopher Bayly, working from existing scholarship, has gone some way in insisting on this aspect for the period 1780-1914. His work is especially powerful in stressing how much two of the most salient aspects of the modern age, the strengthening of the nation-sate and the development of circulations and connections of all sorts, were intertwined variables of an equation rather than two elements in a zero sum game. Besides being a clue that the 'first globalization' is a fragile typification, , the connections and circulations he identified do not cease abruptly after 1914. But what about the lesson that periodizations are ultimately supposed to deliver, that is the assessment of change over time ? Is this just to be jettisoned in favour of a blunt and dull recognition that the modern age has been nothing but a space of flows, at best with ebbs and tides but deprived of any order, or reversely the steady expansion of a single core capitalist system that integrated the rest of the planet in the connections and circulations it generated ? This is when the master narrative periodization should be kept in mind to provide a first clue, and return with a vengeance. There have been several moments in the modern age where protagonists were keen to predict a period of unprecedented change and the advent of a new global age, while former epochs were frozen into "a past of borders, isolation and stasis" (McKeown, 2007, 220). Every teacher of a class about the history of globalization has probably played the quotation game, mixing anonymized citations from Karl Marx, Ulysses Grant, Kenichi Ohmae, Jean Charles de Sismondi, Ghose Ackroyd Aurobindo, Thomas Friedman, Wendell Wilkie, Goethe, Edouard Glissant or Manuel Castells (for the famous) and Carl Ritter, William Stead, King Kalakaua, Elisée Reclus, Max Nordau, Alexander Supan or Guillaume de Greef (my favourite underdogs). When informed about the whos and whens, students are both amused and amazed by how repetitive is the consciousness of what has recently been called the time space compression and the assertion of a move toward a world culture, economy or society. They are also intrigued by the lexicological invention that has been demonstrated to create appropriate neologisms in different languages (like the French *mondialité* which was used in early 20th century Belgium). A subsequent batch of contradictory quotes about the delinking

and unmaking of planetary connections usually helps to bring home the idea that there has been a long contest throughout the modern age about the direction, impact, value of connections and circulations. The canonical periodization not only derives from a focus on economic circulations in the North Atlantic world, it is also an inscription of the personal and collective feelings that resulted dominant (but not exclusive) at different moments of the attempts to capture or define the order of the world: the description of a world united by technologies is a striking common feature for the contemporary observers who felt they were living in a "great acceleration" in the 1890s or the 1990s, while commentators of the late 1930s lumped the interwar years into a dark and gloomy whole to explain to themselves how their world had fragmented and bumped into a wall. Moreover, such visions were for a large part prescriptive and should be read as exhortations to go with the grain and catch the wind of a shrinking or expanding world system. There are no reasons to be satisfied with encoding these visions into our own understanding of the past, and the painstaking reconstruction of connections and circulations should help us imagine other periodizations while we explore the making and unmaking of economic and non-economic flows in order to document how circulations and connections between societies and polities have framed the very existence of these. It might ultimately tell us more about the business of history, that is the assessment of change, than to try telling 'when did globalization begin', walking backwards or forwards with what we call our globalization as a focal point. If we want to narrate the world's past in an age of globality, we must not work backwards and fall pray to the self-fulfilling prophecies of this very age.

What makes connections work ?

If so, the current diagnosis of 'globalisation' would thus have to be read with the hindsight of previous moments where other such prescriptive narratives were developed in the context of universal *hubris*, including the writing of 'universal histories'. Beyond the scope of this volume are world and space views that were defended in the context of the Chinese empire, the protagonists of *dar al-islam* in Caliphate times, the Iberian monarchy or the Tokugawa dynasty. But a transnational perspective suggests that there is profit to consider the range of projects and protagonists that have been at work, engineering connections and circulations with some universal aspirations in the background in the last 150 years. This includes wide and modest designs powered by national governments (Old and New 'American Century' blueprints, late 19th century plans by Hawaii's 'Cosmopolitan King' Kalakaua or current worldviews in sections of the Chinese business and government), political ideologies (the Revolution mantra or the different strands of communism) or private agencies (the Rockefeller Foundation's schemes for a 'free trade of ideas') as well as individual hankerings for

contributing to developing norms, standards or other forms of conversations where the subject was to dispute about what was or should be universal. Recovering the agency of these projects requires to work from first hand material, and to take a deep look into the 'structures necessary to make connections work', in Cooper's words.
This volume has understood 'structures' in a very catholic sense. The steamship, the container box, the symphonic orchestra, the news agency, the publishing industry, the submarine or terrestrial power cables, the international non governmental organisation are such structures. The study of such structures may seem a bit dry, but a first hand study of these has the potential to disclose the logics and order of circulations. This clearly calls for extensive historical investigation. For example, it is not satisfactory to draw on the existence of international associations or non- governmental organisations to assert the existence of a global civil society. The analysis of their printed turnouts such as conference proceedings or campaign material does not give access to the debates and discussions about their programs and activities, nor about their spatial extension or how they got along with other existing groups with similar goals, nor about the way they organised the circulation of information and funds within their flock. To get at what made the connections of such an organisation work, one needs to dive into personal correspondance, outsiders' comments and archives of the organisation, all things that shape the emerged part of the iceberg, that is the public face of campaigns, conferences and publications. The transnational perspective is about the operation and agency of the structures at work across borders. Only then can one assess their 'global' reach and aim.

The search for circulatory regimes

Just as the exploration of different kinds of flows offers a different insight into the periodization of globalisation and the question of its newness, the study of circulations provides the opportunity to consider its comprehensiveness and the limits of interconnections between the different parts of the world. The fact that transnational circulations and connections are not global by nature seems to be obvious. While the non ubiquitous characteristics of ties and flows have often been discarded in both celebrative and critical accounts of globalization, there is a growing concern to recover the extent, direction and order of flows and ties. Several of the contributors to this volume, with very different disciplinary or research track records, have come up with a suggestion to make sense of connections and circulations they research and record over the last 150 years. The proposal is to focus on the structural but dynamic, specific orders that organized, directed and empowered flows and networks of goods, people, ideas, projects

or capital. This does not boil down to a desire to reconnect these flows to the identification of meta processes such as capitalism, imperialism or ideological and religious universal aspirations, and the proposal is much more modest than a suggestion to rethink and expand the world-system theory. Everything that crosses a border is not bound to go global, and there are circulations and connections that have had major impact despite their very limited spatial reach (think of the complex process of comparison, emulation and rejection that have taken place between the polities and societies of Japan and China, or Germany and France). Beyond the specific experiences that are encapsulated in the Dictionary entries, we believe that the study of circulatory regimes or configurations, and of their concatenation over time, is a promising way to capture historical developments of circulations and connections in their multiscalar instantiations. I am not sure that what we mean by 'regimes' or 'configurations' has been inspired by the definitions of these two notions respectively by John Ruggie and Stephen Krasner in international relations theory or Norbert Elias in sociology, but this is not the right place to linger on this lexical dimension. What we are trying to identify are sets of structures and practices with durable effects on the orientation, extent and impact of circulations and connections. A circulatory regime or configuration might be identified by the following characteristics:

- The existence of individual and collective actors –'regime makers'-who invest time, energy and resources (social, economic, or cultural) in the establishment, maintenance and use of connections made to circulate specific items beyond the limits of their polities and societies.

-The formation of intertextual (reading, translation, quotation) and interactional (visits, correspondence, formal and informal organisations) communities, which can be used as resources for action by every member of these communities.

-The establishment of long-term and relatively stable patterns of interactions between mutually identified protagonists that take part to connections and circulations (these interactions pertaining to a range of possibilities, i.e competition or cooperation)

-The agreement of these protagonists and actors on a common language that is the basis of agreements, disagreements, misunderstandings around notions, categories, processes, worldviews that are discussed and disputed among themselves.

-The purposive development of projects, trajectories, aspirations and institutions able to establish connections, nourish circulations and orient them in specific directions.

-The production of a finite, differentiated and uneven landscape where the value of a region (be it a place, an institution, an individual or collective protagonist and actor) is tied with its role and place into the circulatory regime or configuration.

Establishing the circulatory configurations that have succeeded, vied or cohabited in time and space would allow us to assess the orders that have presided over the spatial extension of connections and circulations, and to map the changing intensity, contractions and dilatations of the latter. It does not presuppose the existence of a single and comprehensive system of circulations, but take it for granted that different systems have unfurled in interaction with each other, while some regions may have been left out of the picture. Again, such a concern will be familiar to those who have paid attention to the work our colleagues in sociology or anthropology who have tried to make sense of the problems they had to deal with when they tried to grasp people, artefacts, projects or ideas that stretched across national borders. According to their affiliations, some have used the terms 'transnational system' while others go for 'transnational social field' to name their tools. While we would certainly all insist on the specific value and reach of these different proposals, they have nevertheless all been triggered by a common search for order in the 'space of flows', a desire to recover the degree of autonomy of circulations and connections, and a wish to identify the goals and resources of regime makers. Behind these different proposals, though with different degrees, is the desire to disassemble the seemingly singleness and comprehensiveness of globalisation, and to establish the historical basins of convergence and divergence that were created in order to build or fight interdependence and interconnection among polities and societies. The multiscalar methodology that is increasingly proposed and used by scholars from a wide range of disciplines to study transnational processes enhances such possibilities, as the idea is more and more to study formations, circulations, networks that cut across social spheres usually encoded into our perception of nested scales (the local, the national, the global). The study of circulatory configurations fits within this concern, as it does not start from the local or the global or the national to wonder about the 'impact' of one on the other, but from connections and circulations that defy the conception of nested scales because their structures and protagonists most often simultaneously make use of resources and positions that are usually ascribed to one of these levels. As documented in this *Dictionary*, the study of the circulatory configuration at work during the last 150 years suggests that none of them is embracing the whole planet in its conception or operation, and that connections and circulations do not work 'from' one level to the others.

Conclusion:

If a transnational historical perspective can contribute to the discussions about the whens and wheres of globalization, it is likely because it ultimately proposes a 'hands on' approach to what is said to characterize globalization.

Interdependence, interconnection and their expansion, deepening or speeding are said to be its trademarks. Because it stresses the study of connections and circulations, the transnational approach is very much concerned by what make them work, and accordingly allows us to identify their individual and collective protagonists. It is not a meta history of tropes, discourses and processes (westernization, development,...) as 'big picture' history sometimes turns to be. When it deals with the global, it is to consider projects, designs, aspirations that boasted or concealed a global perspective and implemented it through a mechanics of sort: an organisation, a community, a wire. When it deals with the universal, it is to reconstruct the practical struggles between different definitions of possible universals, and these definitions were embodied into institutions, printed material, technical norms, individual behaviours and group ethos. Such a passion for nuts, bolts and pipes might seem trivial to those who love to juggle with imperialism, capitalism, revolution, modernization, secularism, post fordism or other meta processes and concepts. But by enlisting such processes and concepts as connected circulatory regimes on their own, the modest study of circulatory systems helps pinpoint the goals and resources of specific regimes and regime makers that have tried to control existing connections and circulations, or to establish new ones, sometimes with hankerings for a general and ubiquitous extension in space and society. Ultimately, this empirical dimension might be what makes the transnational approach valuable for students of globalization.

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Further reading

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Cross references: universalism, nature and life sciences, religious pilgrimages, refugees, contract and indentured labour,